Jayne Rountree Commemorative Library
Lambda Community Center
Sacramento, CA

Gay Fathers of Sacramento

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"Each man's life represents a road toward himself." --Herman Hesse

Glenn's Corner By Glenn Holsenbake

Long-term relationships can work

It's been two weeks since our return from vacation to Colorado. We enjoyed a wonderful week exploring the sites and visiting with my Uncle Glenn and his partner, Jim. As we spend time and get to know them better, a lot of different thoughts come into my mind. They are 67 and 83 respectively and have been together for 46 years. A long term, even lifetime, gay relationship is possible as they have lived it. But what makes it possible and what works against the seemingly long odds?

These are some of the observations and impressions I have made in trying to unlock their secrets.

First, you have to work at it. Sounds simple doesn't it. Any relationship takes work to develop, nurture, and – most importantly – grow. A commitment to work at making the relationship successful is very important for a long term relationship to develop. This commitment implies many things along the way, the most important being communications between each other. Sharing your feelings openly and honestly with respect to the other that you would want for yourself.

Also, open honesty and clear communication about what role sex plays in a gay relationship is critical. Is monogamy a better choice than an open relationship for each of the partners. A high level of trust is required for an open relationship and an ability to separate intimate sex between partners from recreational contacts with outsiders. If an open relationship is possible, ground rules clearly agreed upon and adhered to probably need to be established. Each individual within the partnership has to look closely inside themselves and make an honest decision about what feels right for them.

This critical communication is important in other areas as well. For example, when it comes to financial matters, there may be a significant difference in income levels. I certainly have that situation in my relationship. Again, talk openly and honestly about what you are and are not comfortable with. We all grow up with the male provider notion in our heads and just as in accepting ourselves as being different in sexual orientation is tough, so is letting go of this male-provider role.

If there is one pattern to my thoughts, it is that we need make our own way in this life. We need to recognize those things our society, our parents, and our community have set up as expectations for a male, don't necessarily have to apply to us. And just as we need to examine to what degree cultural stereotypes affect us in our relationships, we also need to value the interactive tools needed to build a life together as two gay men. We need to work hard and use those tools daily because a loving, nurturing relationship can be the most wonderful thing between two people and we are deserving of such happiness. ▼

Don't Forget!

MONTHLY MEETING
Sunday Sept. 14 at 6 p.m.
at the Lambda Center
919 20th Street
Sacramento

GFS meets the second Sunday of each month.

Gay Fathers of Sacramento
Support Network
PO Box 161951
Sacramento,CA 95816-1951
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President's Corner by Ed Callahan

Our fathers, our selves

The men's movement never felt very accessible to me. Like a parade watched from within a bus, something exciting was happening, tantalizingly close, yet always just out of reach. Other men could talk knowingly about the shared fire in their bellies but I knew the fire in my belly was ignited by a different spark. Spending years as a gay man waiting to be made straight by the right woman, the intimacy offered in men's workshops seemed too wonderful to be real, too precious to ever be available. Reading about it, I always felt like a kid with his nose pressed up against the window of the bus at the parade- some great stuff happening out there, but none of it available to me. The few brief exposures to men's groups at professional conferences felt great, but guilt about my secret, my sexual orientation, kept me separate, straight-jacketed by the weight of that secret.

Over the past several years, coming out has changed my life. Unexpectedly, growth has become available during years which are usually more stable for many, perhaps even stagnant for others. But meeting the mechanical challenges of life after coming out has also proven hectic: parenting kids half the time, keeping a career going, meeting a wonderful man, building a relationship, building a new support system. All wonderful jobs, yet each has taken time, effort and focus. The hectic life of a gay '90s single parent doesn't allow much time for personal growth.

But the single biggest change turns out to take little time: just introducing myself as a gay man when entering a new group takes little more time than leaving that piece out. In large gatherings recently, I have taken that time and loved the results. My being gay has just been a piece of honesty on the table, and stopped being a wall between me and other men. Being in a committed relationship also takes the pressure off – no need to evaluate others as potential sexual partners or to worry about how to respond to someone else being attracted: "Got a good partner, thanks!" So maybe the time is finally right to explore the men's movement.

"Sharing experiences as gay fathers is truly healing for us, but there is a further healing..."

Where to start? How about with a few people – maybe some gay dads, maybe some gay men who aren't parents, maybe some straight guys – the makeup isn't magic – only the people can be magic. A group of six of us began to talk about life. One man spoke of his disappointment in his father's inability to be there to talk with him in yet another attempt at connecting. Those words struck a chord that ran deep to my core – the search for approval and validation that consistently failed to produce the connection with my dad that I repeatedly sought while he was still alive.

Was this failure to connect my father's fault? Or was it my fault? Is it tough for a straight dad to raise a kid he fears might be gay? It must be. One of the hardest jobs I have is to accept my kids' shortcomings as just normal human stuff, instead of as a secret code to the world that these children are the product of a very flawed man. Maybe that is why sometimes the smell of beer triggers the memory of my dad shouting, "Hey! You're not doing that right!" Too often those words have echoed through the neurons of my memory, producing anger, even rage, on my part. Maybe those words were said more often after my dad noticed I wanted to hang out in the kitchen with my mom and learn to cook. Maybe it's tough for a straight guy to accept a boy like that –

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but then, maybe it shouldn't be. Our culture is still held in a stranglehold by a concept of masculinity that is so fragile that a light dusting of baking flour, or a spirit nourished by music or poetry can destroy it. But then too, my three straight brothers heard the same condemnation – and I don't think the gods of the kitchen or the arts tempted them the way they did me. My talks with those brothers, each of whom I love, helps me understand that we bear many of the same scars, even the one that made it important to raise and love children just to prove that was something we could do right.

One of us speaks after another in our small men's gathering. Each of us tells a different tale while the others listen and feel. Always, the words and images are powerful, and sometimes the pain of another man is jarring, slapping me out of righteous condemnation of my own father, forcing me to take on the more forgiving lenses that only time and perspective can provide. We weep over one another's wounds; we cheer one another's triumphs; we laugh helplessly like young boys under the assault of one another's wit! We men can do that, gay men and straight men, fathers and non-fathers. Sometimes the salt of tears proves healing.

Where was it that I learned that salty water could prove healing? The idea reminds me of being told ocean water was especially healing when we were kids at the beach. The beach – the ocean – healing. There was healing during those special summers spent at the beach with our moms camping in fatherless tribes. The tribes were fatherless because the dads didn't have enough vacation time or couldn't afford to lose time to the competition. Without men to spend time with us, there and at home, we never felt the power of male nurturance to heal our hurts. We never saw the tears that could have let us know that our pain, as small boys, was felt by big men, even by our dads.

So only now, well into adulthood, is it clear that shared male tears provide healing balm with near miraculous power. Such a balm is not the kind you can buy at the drugstore. The healing takes place when it is among gay men alone, and the healing takes place when it is a combination of honest gay and straight men together. I cannot know if it happens among straight men alone – I have never been in such a group and never can be. But now I can watch the straight men in the parade of the men's movement from the bus and applaud them or I can get off the bus and join them. My joining them changes the nature of the parade, maybe even enriches it. The honesty of coming out has opened that door to me and to them – making it a better parade – helping stengthen the shared healing provided by the company of caring and nurturant men.

Sharing experiences as gay fathers is truly healing for us, but there is a further healing needed by us as men afflicted with growing up in this culture with its messages about men and masculinity. We need to explore what it is to be a man; where we learned to be men in this world; and how we have struggled to recognize and love ourselves as the men we are. We need to learn to truly love each other. Not to love each other sexually – that part is really easy – some "straight" men even do that. No, our task is to learn to love other men to the core for carrying the burden of being men. So the task is to go back to the beach as adults to live as a tribe with men, to learn. With that learning, we can value one another for smiling and laughing in a world that says we must be serious, for nurturing when the world says we must compete, and for loving when the world says that to love is to be weak.

Homophobia works hard to keep all men closeted, locked away from the love and support of other men. Defeating homophobia as gay fathers allows us to open the door to a wonderful personal vindication and growth in our lives, just as defeating homophobia is critical to opening the door to healing and love in our straight brothers' lives. It may even open the door to a forgiving salute to the fathers who tried their best. Forgiveness becomes possible as we hear each other's stories and discover that we can learn to write a new ending about fathers and sons, and about all men, that includes love. ▼

Poetry & Quotations ...

[POEM]

Touch that secret sigh

that fragile cosmos whispering your true name,
give it the deep breath
marshaled from the rich continents
of an undiscovered soul.

Caress that secret sigh,
nurse that feeble ember frightened on the edge of
cold death.
Feed it the living bodies of strong warriors.

Kiss that secret sigh though forbidden
by the great army of moments that have marched
before.
Call out to it through the ragged walls of darkness.
You must not believe the ill incantations
your bones have memorized from the lips of elders.
You must abandon that ancient religion
no matter how frightened you become.

You must take what you need now,
someday you'll realize there is nothing else.

Hold that secret sigh gently in your hands.
Move a world out of the way,
make a big space for a miracle.
Build a majestic city where a giant can dance.

Embrace that secret sigh
against your body
like the lover it has always been.

Teach it the magic of fire,
let it explode
and consume a lifetime.

Austin Lewis ▼

"Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men."
– Seneca

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/ The proper study of mankind is man."
–Alexander Pope

"Trees and fields tell me nothing: men are my teachers."
–Plato

"La vraie science et la vraie étude de l'homme, c'est l'homme." [The true science and study of man is man.]
–Pierre Charron, 1601

"Das eigentliche Studium der Menschheit ist der Mensch." [The proper study of mankind is man.]
–Goethe

"I went to the woods because I wished to life deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."
–Thoreau

"Two roads divirged in a wood, and I – / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference."
– Frost

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."
– Blaise Pascal, 1670

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